

THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION IS ON AGAIN

Party vs. State

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ON THE eve of the fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917, the Soviet Union has been launched on yet another social revolution—on yet another turn of the wheel, that is, of that permanent revolution from above by which the rule of the Communist party is maintained. That and nothing less is the meaning of the dramatic victory scored by Khrushchev over his opponents in the presidium of the party.

It is obvious to all that, by eliminating his chief rivals, Khrushchev has ended the fiction of "collective leadership" and restored the primacy of the head of the party machine, familiar to us from Stalin's time. It is equally obvious that he has done so in the name of new policies—policies which he claims represent neither a return to Stalin's system, nor a repudiation of the main line of the Stalinist tradition, but a bold advance forward from Stalinism. What is not yet generally understood is just what these new policies are.

Yet it seems to me that the signs are plain enough for all to read. Khrushchev's

WHAT does the Khrushchev purge imply and forebode about the ultimate fate of Soviet Russian despotism? RICHARD LOWENTHAL's detailed analysis of the shake-up in the Russian leadership follows Mr. Wolfe's more general considerations on the durability of Soviet totalitarianism. Mr. Lowenthal's highly informed commentaries on international politics appear regularly in the *London Observer*. He was educated in Germany and earned his doctorate in economics and sociology at the University of Heidelberg. Under Hitler he was active in the Socialist underground, before emigrating to England. He contributed "The Crisis Behind Russia's Slowdown," to our December 1953 issue.

primary objective is neither "de-Stalinization," nor "decentralization," least of all "democratization." It is nothing less than the ending of the dualism of party and state machine by which the Soviet Union has been governed for the past four decades—the institution of direct rule over the country, including direct management of its economy, by party secretaries. The Soviet state is to "wither away" at last, as Lenin promised—but only in the technical sense of having its bureaucracy no longer *controlled* but *replaced* by that of the party.

It is a tremendous undertaking, without example even in the annals of modern totalitarianism, and it may fail. But let us first examine the evidence for saying that it has started.

For the past two months, the Soviet Union has been without a "government" in the traditional sense of the term. Not only have twenty-five industrial ministries been dissolved; not only have the prime ministers of the sixteen constituent republics been granted membership in the all-Union government, thus making it a representative rather than an executive body; but the life and soul of the government, the "inner cabinet" of deputy prime ministers, has disappeared, and nothing has taken its place—nothing, i.e., on the governmental plane. Some of the former deputy premiers have become sectional heads in the reorganized Gosplan (State Planning Commission); five leading ones, who were also members of the party presidium,* have been demoted as a result of Khrushchev's purge. Only the everlasting Mikoyan and the new head of Gosplan, Y. Y. Kuz-

*Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, Pervukhin, and Saburov.

min, are left with the title of "first deputy premier."

It may be objected that the real policy-making body was the party presidium all the time. Consider, then, the changes in the composition of the presidium. It has now been inflated to comprise 15 voting members and 9 candidates—including all the 8 members of the party's central secretariat. Only once before had the presidium been larger—after Stalin's last party congress, in November 1952, when 25 full members and 11 candidates were elected. But in that body of 36, the 10 members of the secretariat and 3 provincial party secretaries were balanced by 12 deputy premiers and four other ministers of the Union government, with Premier Stalin and Deputy Premier Malenkov combining functions in the government and the party secretariat. In the new presidium of 24, the 8 members of the central secretariat, together with the first secretaries of Leningrad, Gorki, and Sverdlovsk, of the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Latvia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan, add up to 16 representatives of the party machine, while the Union government is only represented by Premier Bulganin, Deputy Premier Mikoyan, Marshal Zhukov, and Ministers Pervukhin and Kosygin. The balance is gone; the men formally charged to carry on the government are not in a position decisively to influence policy.

THIS disorganization and demotion of the government is, of course, the direct consequence of Khrushchev's scheme for the reorganization of economic planning. The need for such a reorganization was recognized on all sides; its direction was bitterly contested—indeed it formed one of the two central issues in the struggle between Khrushchev and his opponents. It was the critics of Khrushchev who first raised the demand for an overhaul of the planning machinery (as well as a revision of current plans) last December, when Khrushchev's authority stood lowest on the morrow of the Polish and Hungarian events. They called for more realistic tar-

gets, better coordination, and less disturbance of the plan by sudden "campaigns"—in fact, for more rationality and less propaganda; and they won, besides some investment cuts, the creation of a greatly strengthened "State Economic Commission" of high-powered economic administrators which was to submit its reform proposals in February. Yet by February, Khrushchev was politically on top again; he and not Pervukhin, the chairman of the commission, proposed the reforms, and got approval for an outline suggesting the creation of regional planning organs under control of the party. Between then and March 30, when Khrushchev published his theses, that idea had hardened into the proposal to make the regional "Councils for National Economy" the "basic link" in the new planning machinery under the Gosplan, and abolish the industrial ministries of the Union, and of the national republics, altogether.

At its first appearance, this proposal was widely interpreted outside Russia as a step towards "decentralization" of the economy in the Yugoslav sense, however strongly Khrushchev himself denied this intention; nor was it recognized that the sudden switch from having recently strengthened the State Economic Commission to replacing it by a Gosplan with increased powers was due to the objections raised against Khrushchev's scheme by the experienced economic administrators attached to the commission. But when the scheme was presented to the Supreme Soviet in May (with minor amendments preserving, for the time being and with reduced powers, a few industrial ministers in the Union and republican governments) and when the economic councils came to be appointed subsequently, two things became clear: that none of Khrushchev's presidium colleagues concerned with economic administration had supported him in the discussion; and that the presidents of the new economic councils were generally party secretaries—usually the second secretaries of the regions concerned. What had started as a drive for more economic rationality had

turned into a drive for more direct party rule in the economic field.

Nor was this at all inconsistent with Khrushchev's record. Ever since he took over as First Secretary of the party, he had been noteworthy for the attention he paid to technical economic detail: to methods of sowing potatoes, to the value of planting maize for fodder, and to the advantages of building with concrete. There had, of course, been Western observers who hailed him on that account as a practical man who had no time for ideological nonsense and was turning the Communist party into a kind of glorified polytechnic. Yet against this there was the evidence of his passion for foreign travel and speechmaking—the evidence, in fact, that he is a primitive but perfectly genuine believer in the Leninist concept of world revolution. The ideal he put before the young generation of *apparatchiki* was that of a man who would combine a universal competence in the technical problems of production with a perfect Marxist-Leninist understanding of the international scene. It may be a difficult ideal to fulfill, but there is no reason to doubt that Khrushchev holds it sincerely. In one and the same speech at the 20th Party Congress last year, he developed the advantages of taking power by such “legal” and “parliamentary” methods as were employed in Czechoslovakia in 1948, and suggested that party regional secretaries ought to be paid salaries in proportion to the production successes of their region! The latter proposal seemed strange enough at a time when a formal separation of party and administration was still the official doctrine; it makes perfect sense in the framework of Khrushchev's revolution.

BUT does the revolution itself make sense? Khrushchev is turning the top-heavy administrative machinery of a gigantic command economy upside down. He is breaking overnight the customary links, thus clogging the well-worn channels of command; he is driving all the most competent higher administrators into frantic opposition

without arousing enthusiasm from the managers in the field, who will still be under strict orders, but from new and usually less competent, though somewhat nearer people. He is, in short, running the risk of destroying the over-complicated mechanism of detailed planning from the center, without daring to replace it by bold reliance on market forces and managerial initiative within a broadly planned framework. And he is taking sole responsibility for the consequences—even to the point of appointing one of his assistants from the party secretariat, a man without high-level experience of decision-making, as head of Gosplan and first deputy premier!

Why, then, did he do it? The old planning system was certainly creaking, but its crisis was not desperate. True, ever since the immediate postwar reconstruction was over, the rates of Soviet industrial growth had gradually slowed down; that was inevitable as the phase of “primitive accumulation” had ended, as industry could no longer rely on a steady influx of new millions of workers from the countryside, and as even natural population growth had slowed down. It had been the common conviction of the post-Stalin leaders that such a situation required increased attention to the raising of output per manshift, and hence increased reliance on incentives rather than coercion; the gradual transformation of the labor camps into forced settlements of “free” workers and the material concessions to both workers and peasants had their origin in this conviction. For the same reasons, there was certainly growing pressure to eliminate the shocking bureaucratic waste of the command economy, to improve cost accounting, and decentralize the power of decision. There was pressure, in other words, to move towards greater economic rationality by adopting a broadly planned market economy, as the Yugoslavs had done as early as 1952. But that is not what Khrushchev is doing.

Must we explain his scheme, then, purely in terms of the struggle for personal power? The “rational” solution, with its

greater scope for the managers, might have appealed to Malenkov and some of the "technocrats" in the Economic Commission; the old "Stalinists," like Molotov and Kaganovich, would have tended to defend the old forms of centralized departmental control. Did Khrushchev devise his scheme with its reliance on his own appointees and natural supporters, the regional party secretaries, as the best means to defeat both groups of opponents and secure full control? That, I believe, is at least part of the truth; for even though the urgency of the economic situation was not desperate, that of Khrushchev's personal situation last winter probably was.

At the December plenum, Malenkov and the Stalinist "conservatives" seem to have united in blaming Khrushchev's rash advances to Tito and his "de-Stalinization" speech at the 20th Party Congress for having lowered Russia's international authority and produced the upheaval in Eastern Europe. Khrushchev had his back to the wall, and may have been saved only by Chinese support for his view that the unity of the Soviet bloc could not be restored by a simple return to Stalin's "Great Power chauvinism," and that a precarious compromise with Gomulka which maintained unity in foreign policy was preferable to another Hungary nearer home. He saw that unless he got rid of his opponents, his opponents would sooner or later get rid of him; and just as Stalin took the great foreign policy defeat of his early years—the break-up of the alliance between the Chinese Communists and the Kuomintang in 1927—as a signal to force the surrender or expulsion of his critics in that same year, so Khrushchev may have resolved to force an issue of his own choice as soon as he got a chance.

It was, then, the crucial decisions demanded by the East European revolution of last autumn that led to irreconcilable conflict within the "collective leadership," and thus made the present crisis inevitable. The planning reform was the issue chosen by Khrushchev himself for fighting it out. But

it plainly raised even more resistance than Khrushchev had expected; and the question remains how so risky, so patently irrational a scheme could win at all against such strongly entrenched opposition.

THE answer is, in my view, that a "rational" solution of the problem of economic planning was—and is—in conflict with the interests of single-party rule. Khrushchev chose this issue for the decisive inner-party struggle and won on it, because his policy coincides with the party's interest in preserving its power in the new industrial society it has helped to create.

A genuine economic "decentralization"—the granting of freedom for managerial initiative and the forces of supply and demand—would deprive the party of a tremendous lever of power over the new managerial class. It would strengthen the feeling—which has inevitably grown with the growth of a modern industry, army, and administration—that the party is a kind of parasitic appendix to this modern society, no longer needed for its proper functioning. If accompanied—as it must be in order to create a genuine market economy—by the abolition of forced agricultural deliveries, it would reduce the party's power over the peasants to the same extent. (When both steps were taken in Yugoslavia, the managerial class was still very weak, but the growth in peasant self-confidence and independence proved very marked and led fairly soon to a dissolution of most collective farms. The difference was, of course, that the pressure toward economic rationality in the Yugoslav situation was much more severe than in Russia today.)

The Soviet Communist party has been concerned with this problem of the new industrial upper class ever since it emerged from the first Five Year Plan. At that time, in 1934, the party still contained many of the old revolutionaries from the working class and pre-war intelligentsia, while the new upper class had developed largely outside the party. It was the basic function of Stalin's blood purge of the 30's to

overcome this discrepancy; by eliminating the traditional revolutionary element from the party and driving the new bureaucracy into its fold, he created a personal union between the organ of power and the class of privilege. Once the profiteers of the revolution had joined the Jacobin Club, there could be no more Thermidor!

Twenty years later, history has shown that despite the personal union between the ruling party and the governing bureaucracy, the division of function remains a source of conflict. The manager and economic administrator, even though a party member, tends to think in terms of personal security, social stability, and economic rationality: confident in his own competence, he feels sure he could hold an equal job even if there was no party—and perhaps with less troublesome interference. The party secretary or editor, even though a privileged bureaucrat, tends to think in terms of power and its ideological justification: he sees industry and the army, the whole modern Soviet society, as the creation of the party, and the end of party control to him would be the end of everything. But with the passage of time since the revolution, and with the discredit into which the party has fallen thanks to its purges, turns, and abuses, and lately thanks to the shock of the East European revolution, his outlook has become less typical and more isolated.

Now Khrushchev is trying once again to bridge the gap—if a union of persons was not enough, a union of functions must be created. No doubt he hopes to get along without a blood purge of comparable scale; though Malenkov and Molotov have been attacked for forming an “anti-party group” and, more ominously, for their share in the frameups of the past, the recalcitrant economic bureaucrats are not yet being pilloried as “enemies of the people.” But what will he do if his scheme breaks down?

BEFORE we go further, it may be useful to try and relate our analysis to the discussion of the over-all trends of Soviet society now in progress among Western stu-

dents of the problem. Leaving aside the optimists of “democratization” and the professional exhorters who look at every change in the Soviet orbit as mere “trickery” designed to deceive the unwary, there remain two principal approaches. On one side are those who argue that the growth of a modern industrial society with universal literacy and widespread technical competence, and of a self-confident new upper and middle class, will exert a pressure toward more rational methods of rule that is ultimately bound to prove irresistible—that as society matures and revolutionary fervor subsides, the regime itself is bound to “mellow.” On the other side are those who stress the unique character of the totalitarian party regime which reacts to all social pressures not by either giving in or resisting change, but by manipulating the inevitable changes in such a way as to preserve its own power and dynamism—in a manner, that is, that remains revolutionary and “irrational” from a purely economic point of view.

What we have said so far constitutes an implicit criticism of the first-named approach: it is the “irrational” Khrushchev with his party bosses, not the “rational” Malenkov with his managers and economic administrators, who has won the latest round; and the reason is to be found precisely in the logic of self-preservation of the party regime, which, after forty years, still remains a revolutionary regime in its origin and justification. Revolutionary regimes do not mellow, they continue until they are overthrown and their social and economic results are incorporated into a different kind of regime. The people may long have lost their faith in the revolutionary shibboleths; the party cannot abandon its ideology without abandoning power. It maintains this power by using it to twist society into an artificial, preconceived pattern, by allowing none of its basic classes to settle down in stability and security, by reacting to every pressure from growing social forces with another turn of the screw of permanent revolution from above. After the recovery

of peasant agriculture in the 20's, the forced collectivization; after the rise of a new managerial class in the 30's, the blood purge; after the new consolidation of this class in the 50's, following Stalin's death, Khrushchev's move toward direct party rule. . . .

Yet there is something dangerously one-sided also in this picture. The party, after all, is not God; if it does make history, it cannot do so arbitrarily. Not all the changes to which it reacts were foreseen in its theory; not all the measures it takes were part of its original program. If it seeks to respond to every pressure in such a way as to preserve its power, there is no preordained guarantee that it will always succeed in doing so. The true history of the Soviet system is certainly not that of the automatic modification of the regime by outside social and economic forces, but neither is it that of the pure unfolding of the grand design of the totalitarian regime: it is the history of dynamic interaction between the logic of economic and social growth and the logic of totalitarianism—an interaction which frequently takes the form of conflict, and in which measures taken in order to preserve the regime may well have the unforeseen effect of undermining it. The party, we said, cannot mellow; but it may fail.

LET us now apply this "dialectical" approach to the history of the past four years. On the morrow of Stalin's death, the party was at its lowest point in vitality and prestige; Malenkov, when faced by the "collective" with the choice between leadership of the government or of the party machine, seems voluntarily to have preferred the premiership; and the initiative passed for a time to state organs. (In the party presidium as then reconstructed, there was only one member of the central secretariat among its 10 members and 4 candidates—Khrushchev—and only 2 provincial secretaries, while besides Premier Malenkov those 14 included 4 "first deputy premiers," 3 other deputy premiers, and one more minister—an imbalance as strong as the

present one, but in the opposite direction!)

But while Malenkov busied himself to restore confidence and keep the economy going by material concessions, Khrushchev set to work to revive the party. The most urgent condition for this was the downgrading of the secret police, which, by being used as the instrument of Stalin's personal rule, had come to exert power over the constituted party organs. The execution of Beria and Abakumov and the accompanying campaign enabled Khrushchev gradually to reassert the primacy of the party machine, to oust Malenkov from the premiership, and finally at the 20th Congress to pack the Central Committee with his own nominees.

Yet at this very same congress, Khrushchev was made aware of the extent of the accumulated social pressure for greater security and stability—a pressure that had got a chance to make itself felt after the downgrading of the secret police, and that was now turned on the party itself—largely from inside. Would not the revival of the party, and of the control of the First Secretary over the Central Committee, eventually lead to the rise of another Stalin with all the well-remembered horrors of his rule? So strong was this fear that Khrushchev had to appease it with a triple moral guarantee. First, by his "secret" speech he "disclosed" Stalin's methods and explicitly disowned the doctrine on which the blood purges were based—the theory of the "sharpening of the class struggle" with every progress in the construction of "socialism," which could conveniently be used to discover new "class enemies" for every new phase in the permanent revolution. Second, he allowed opponents whom he had already defeated politically—Malenkov over the question of economic policy, Molotov over the concessions to Yugoslavia and the satellites and the partial disavowal of Stalin—to be re-elected to the party presidium, although in his new, hand-picked Central Committee he could have prevented their election even then. Third, he had the head of the army, Marshal Zhukov (who had become

deputy war minister when Stalin died and war minister when Malenkov fell), elected to the presidium as a candidate—an unprecedented concession to the political weight of the army.

The essential point is that all these concessions were *not* made for strictly inner-party reasons: they amounted to a peace offer to the nation's leading strata, and to the other pillars of the administration, by the party machine. They were, in fact, assured that if they put up with the restored primacy of the party machine, there would be no more insecurity, no more hunt for "enemies," no return to paranoia as a system of government; there would, on the contrary, be a respectful hearing for the spokesmen of the economic bureaucracy and the army within the highest party councils. The "compromise," such as it was, was reflected in the balance within the new party presidium: among 11 members and 6 candidates, there were 8 government members (Bulganin, 6 deputy premiers, and Zhukov), 5 members of the central secretariat, and 2 provincial party secretaries.

It is this compromise which Khrushchev has now torn up, this balance which he has shattered. The truce between the party machine and Soviet society is broken: the permanent revolution is on again. Rather than submit to the gradual erosion of the party's primacy by the economic bureaucracy, which a rational solution of the planning problems would have implied, Khrushchev has preferred to declare war on the economic bureaucracy and attempt direct party rule in economic life.

Now as at the 20th Congress, it was the party machine that decided the outcome. But the two opposite decisions—then for a compromise in order to restore confidence, now for tearing it up in order to prevent the gradual undermining of party rule—are not just the result of Khrushchev's Machiavellian trickery: they express a genuine dilemma. The social pressures have become stronger, after all, with the growth of a modern industrial society. The road of concessions leads ultimately to the Ther-

midor. The road of open defiance of the new social forces leads to the party's growing isolation.

Traditionally, Soviet administration has rested on four main hierarchical pillars—the party machine, the secret police, the economic bureaucracy, and the army. Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, they have all been represented in varying proportions in the highest policy-making organ, the Politburo or party presidium, though most of the time the army was represented only by a political minister. After Beria's fall, the downgraded secret police ceased to have top-level representation; now the spokesmen of the economic bureaucracy have disappeared. Khrushchev and his party bosses are left alone with the representative of the last pillar—the army.

IT HAS been hinted by Soviet sources, and stated outright by Western commentators, that Marshal Zhukov played a decisive role in the latest battle for power. Even assuming that the semi-official account of Khrushchev's loss of a majority in the party presidium is true—and it is quite conceivable that there was a last desperate rallying of resistance on the eve of the final coming into force of Khrushchev's scheme, scheduled for July 1—there was hardly more required of the Marshal than to sit quiet: in the absence of intervention by outside force, a struggle between the majority of the presidium and the secretariat was bound to end with the victory of the latter, because the secretariat could always rely on the Khrushchevite majority of the Central Committee. Yet even Khrushchev's opponents, being life-long party men, would probably have recoiled from calling for army intervention in order to get rid of the First Secretary before the Central Committee could be convened: if they had tried and failed, they certainly would not have got off with an expulsion from the Central Committee.

The Marshal, then, was not called upon explicitly to decide between the party leaders; but everybody knew that he *could*

have swayed the decision—that he had become the implicit arbiter of their dispute. By choosing not to act, by demonstrating his loyalty to the party statute as handled by the machine, he justified the confidence placed in him by Khrushchev, who has allowed him persistently to reduce the role of the army political administration at a time when party control was being strengthened in every other sphere. As a result, the former dualism between the various branches of state administration on one side, and the party organs controlling them on the other, is coming to be replaced by a dualism of a very different kind—between a party directly running the other branches of government, and a virtually independent army united to it at the top.

The risks of this arrangement are obvious. They must appear even greater when it is recalled that the unity of the party leadership is by no means assured even now. One of the most sinister consequences of Khrushchev's costly victory is the breakdown of the mutual amnesty which the leaders had originally granted each other for their participation in Stalin's crimes. As late as Khrushchev's "secret" speech, the role of the other surviving leaders in Stalin's murderous purges was hushed up almost as well as Khrushchev's own. Now, Malenkov has been attacked for his share in the 1949 "Leningrad affair," and Molotov and

Kaganovich for their participation in the purges of the 30's. These look like opening moves in a struggle to the death; and they may well be supplemented by new charges of sabotage if Khrushchev's scheme results in economic breakdown.

But could the Soviet Union of today stand even a partial repetition of the horrors of twenty years ago? Could a party which has once before gone through it all, has admitted how callously the charges were faked and how brutally the confessions were extorted, and has now fatally weakened its links with the leading strata of the country, impose another blood purge at this stage? Would not the call for a strong man who could stop the bloodshed and the ideological nonsense and restore law and order become irresistible if addressed to the only possible candidate for that role—the head of the army?

Revolutions have ended in this way before. We cannot, of course, forecast that the Soviet regime must go the same way. But we can state that the dilemma of the party regime has reached a stage where every measure taken to insure its survival increases the danger to it from another quarter. By knocking away the other pillars—the secret police and the economic bureaucracy—the regime has threatened its own stability. The last pillar may well outlive the collapse of the building.